

A Passion for Baking Bread

By Alex Henkel



Brittany Migneault, owner of The Bread Shed, makes a variety of bread in Keene.

An neighboring vendor at the Keene Farmers' Market helps Brittany Migneault pop up The Bread Shed tent and maneuver folding tables into place. As the 9 a.m. horn blows to signify the official start of the market, the last basket of freshly baked bread lands on the table. Already, a line of customers has formed.

Taking a breath, Migneault, owner of The Bread Shed, steps forward to greet the regular customer at the head of the line. "Have you tried the 'Altamura,' one of our traditional Italian breads? It's denser and more flavorful due to the use of durum flour," she says.

With more than a dozen breads currently available, and new varieties offered every month, even long-time customers eagerly await the latest samples, with guidance from The Bread Shed founder on the characteristics and heritage of each kind.

A new customer reaches for a taste of jalapeno cheddar. "Watch out!" Migneault jokes, "That's spicy enough it should have a warning label."

Later, in a momentary pause, she confides, "I probably shouldn't be such a smart aleck." But, her customers don't seem to mind.

Taking the heat

"I wouldn't miss this time to connect with customers," Migneault explains, even after rising at 4 a.m. the previous day and sometimes working through the entire day and night to provide the freshest, preservative-free bread at the Saturday morning farmers' market. "I can sleep after the market ends at two."

Beyond the long hours, intense heat from baking leads Migneault to admit, "even the hardest worker can find the heat in the bakery hard to take."

Whatever the weather, The Bread Shed bakes Monday, Wednesday and Friday in a 1,100 square foot facility on Park Avenue in Keene, with deliveries within hours of coming out of

the oven to stores, restaurants, farm stands and farmers' markets from Putney to Peterborough. Migneault is supported by a team of three mostly part-time employees, as well as family and friends who pitch in where needed.

"We talked about doing this for six years," she says, motioning to include her father Tom Migneault, who has been involved in starting five successful companies. To set her plans in motion, she started a six-month apprenticeship with her uncle Glenn Loati, who grew his own business, La Panciata, into Vermont's largest independent bread bakery over the past 20 years.

A family affair

Migneault writes on her website: "My uncle has taught me everything I know about baking, from the ingredients and chemistry to the second-generation recipes to the intricacies of creating and managing a successful bakery."

Her mother helps keep the accounting organized, and her sister assists with photography.

"I think she is building an amazing business," her father says with pride, noting the many milestones passed since the first sale in April 2011. By June 2011, she was delivering 600 loaves in a week. By June 2012, she was baking that quantity in a single Friday, plus 600 recently developed burger buns and the latest addition of chocolate chip cookies.

While there are accounting and other business details to think of, The Bread Shed does allow Migneault to do what she does best: bake.

"From day one, I knew that I had found my passion, my life, in baking," she says. 🍞

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